764 have the occasion to talk with one. If a priest is called, he kneels before
793 the coffin, rings a bell, and recites from the sutras. His recitation is in
[177] a Japanized Sanskrit, which is probably wholly incomprehensible to all. After the recitation he burns incense before the coffin and the assembled relatives and friends do likewise. The coffin is then carried out of the house and put into the gang, a red palanquin that is village property in many villages. At this point all present pray. The procession to the tomb now begins. It is led by the bearer of a flag announcing the death, followed by the priest (if there is one), then the paper tablet carried by the heir of the deceased, who holds an umbrella over it. Then the family comes, then male relatives and neighbors, and then the gang containing the coffin, borne by four neighbors of the deceased. And finally come the female relatives and neighbors of the deceased. When the procession arrives at the enclosure before the tomb, the neighbors who have been bearing the gang set it down and relatives take the coffin out and carry it in before the tomb. Only relatives and the priest enter. While the women again weep aloud the coffin is put into the tomb and offerings are left before it. In returning, the women take a different route.

● 767 Formerly funeral processions were led by member of a special profes-
565 sion called nimbuchaa (from nimbuchi, J. 'nembutsu', a kind of Buddhist
[171] prayer for the dead). These persons formed a separate social class looked down upon by others, and lived in a few separate villages, rather like the Eta of Japanese society.

765 Bone-Washing and the Tomb After the body has been in the coffin a suitable length of time, usually about two years, the coffin is removed from the tomb, the body is removed from the coffin, which is destroyed, the remaining decayed flesh is then washed from the bones, and they are returned to the tomb.

764 In Northern Okinawa the tombs are relatively small and are usually the property of smaller kinship units, but in Southern Okinawa the tombs are larger and are usually the property of the larger kin groups, the munchu. In some instances several munchu share the same tomb. Even the smaller tombs are built with considerable expense; the larger ones cost the equivalent of several hundred dollars. Both the larger and the smaller tombs contain a floor at ground level upon which a coffin may be set and behind this a shelf or
[363] shelves upon which washed bones are placed. Families descended from the former gentry class place the washed bones into large urns. Commoners simply place the bones on the shelf and when the shelf is filled, push the older bones into a pit behind the shelf. If one death follows another so closely that there is a coffin with unwashed bones still in the tomb, the family, rather than reopen the tomb too soon, may choose to make a temporary tomb by walling a natural opening in the rocks. Or, as may happen in the case of the tombs belonging to the larger kin groups, if there is a body in the tomb with flesh sufficiently decayed for bone-washing, the family who suffered that loss may wash the bones at the same time that the family who has suffered the second loss is holding its funeral.

765 The bone-washing is an emotionally charged performance. Women usually wash the bones and do so with a great and apparently genuine display of grief.